

FLOODING

What is one of the most common forms of natural disaster? **Floods.** The scope and scale of a flood can range from affecting a single neighborhood to affecting an entire region.

TYPES OF FLOODS

Floods can occur for many different reasons, however they can be categorized into two broad categories:

Overland Floods occur when water gradually rises, sometimes over a period of days, as a result of increased rainfall or rising bodies of water.

Flash Floods, as their name implies, happen quickly, sometimes in just a few minutes. Flash floods may have dangerous walls of rushing water that sweep away everything in its path.

Flooding occurs in every state. No matter where you live, you need to be aware of, and prepared for the possibility of flooding.

KNOW THE TERMINOLOGY

The NOAA (National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration) and your local weather services will issue information about the possibility of flooding in your area. Here are the terms and what they mean.

FLOOD WATCH

This means flooding is possible. You need to stay informed to local media for more information.

FLASH FLOOD WATCH

This alert status means flash flooding is possible and you should be prepared to move to higher ground. You need to stay informed to local media for more information.

FLOOD WARNING

This alerts you that flooding is occurring, or is about to occur. Listen to emergency broadcasts and if evacuation is advised, do so at once.

FLASH FLOOD WARNING

This alert means that flash flooding is occurring or about to occur. You should seek higher ground at once.

REMEMBER THESE FLOOD EVACUATION TIPS:

Only six inches of moving water can make a person fall. If you must walk in floodwater, walk where the water is still. Be sure to check the ground in front with a stick as you walk.

Vehicles can be quickly washed away by floodwaters. Six inches of moving water is enough to make a vehicle lose control. Many vehicles will float in only one foot of water. Two feet of rushing water has enough power to wash away the heaviest of SUVs.

The safest bet is to not drive in flooded areas. If your vehicle becomes surrounded by floodwater, abandon the car and move to higher ground.



PROTECTING YOURSELF BEFORE A FLOOD

While it's impossible to predict a flood or be fully prepared for its consequence, there are some things you can do to minimize losses.

Firstly, don't build in flood prone areas. If you must, make sure your home is reinforced and properly protected from a potential flood.

Check your sump pump. If your home or basement has a sump pump, test the pump to ensure that it's working properly.

Install "check valves" in sewer traps to prevent floodwater from backing up into the drains of your home.

Seal the walls in your basement with waterproofing compounds to avoid seepage.

Raise appliances as high as possible on cinder blocks or wood. Shut off the power to your appliances at the breaker. For larger appliances, wrap them in polyethylene film to try and keep the water out.

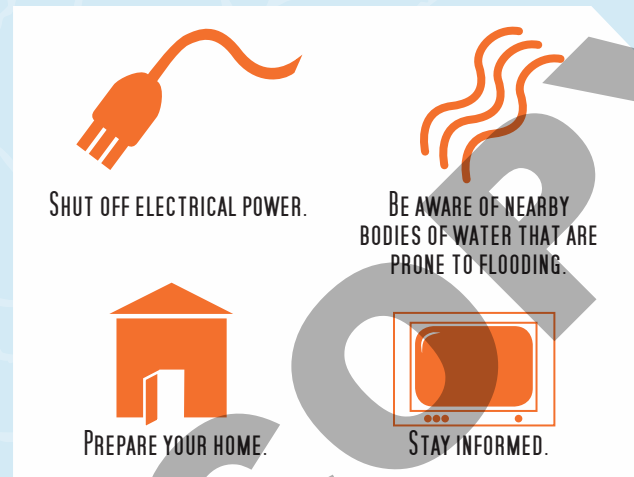
Place hazardous materials such as oil, paint, cleaning supplies and other dangerous chemicals out of the way of flood waters.

Have an escape plan. Know what streets are likely to flood. Have a location, pre-determined, where you and your family will go in the event of a flood.

Don't forget to have a plan for your pets. Most shelters won't allow pets due to health concerns. Leaving pets behind is not a good option as they may destroy property or be at risk of death and injury due to the flood.

Be prepared for life without electricity. Make sure you have at least three days worth of food that doesn't require refrigeration or cooking. Also, be sure to have a non-electric can opener, and battery-powered essentials such as radios and flashlights on hand. And don't forget the extra batteries!

Be prepared for evacuation. Make an evacuation kit. Some things to include would be extra clothes and shoes, nonperishable food and water, paper plates, disposable utensils, blankets and sleeping bags, important medications and special needs items for infants and seniors, a first aid kit, cash and credit cards, insurance documents, and a list of important phone numbers.



WHAT TO DO DURING A FLOOD

If it's likely that your area may experience flooding, keep the following in mind:

Stay informed. Listen to local broadcasts on radio or television for the latest updates.

Flash flooding can happen in just a few moments. If there is any chance of flash flooding, don't wait for instructions; get to higher ground at once.

Know what areas, streams, canals, channels or canyons are known to flood suddenly. Flash floods can happen to these areas even if there is not sign of rain.

If flooding is imminent and you must evacuate, do the following, time permitting:

Prepare your home. Clear outside debris and bring inside patio furniture and plants.

Shut off electrical power to sections of your home that may flood. Even if water doesn't reach the outlets, keeping the power on greatly increases the risk of deadly electrical shock.

Move valuable possessions to higher ground. Get irreplaceable items such as photos and important documents out of harm's way. Consider storing these valuables in plastic, watertight containers and placing them high on shelving.

AFTER THE FLOOD

Once the floodwaters have receded, use the following tips to stay safe.

Drinking water may have been contaminated during the flood. Listen to local media to determine when the water is safe to drink.

Stay away from floodwaters. Floodwater is usually contaminated with gasoline, oil, sewage and other chemicals. Downed or underground electrical power lines may lie just under the surface.

Steer clear of moving water.

Stay away from downed power lines. Report downed lines to the power company.

Use caution in areas where floodwaters have retreated. Road and other structures may have been weakened due to the flooding.

Don't return home until the authorities have given the all clear to do so.

Do not enter buildings still surrounded by floodwaters.

When entering a building, be alert for hidden damage to the structure and foundation.

Damaged sewer systems pose a serious health risk. Service and repair damaged septic systems, cesspools, pits and leech systems as soon as possible.

Clean and disinfect every item exposed to the floodwater. Mud and floodwater residue can contain sewage and other chemicals.

While floods are often impossible to prevent, having the right plan in place, and following these safety tips, may save your valuables, your life and the lives of your loved ones.

